



Springfield-Greene County
Health Department
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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 9-20-06*****

From the Office of the Director of Health

Consumers Cautioned to Avoid Fresh Spinach

The Springfield-Greene County Health Department encourages consumers to follow the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) recommendation to avoid eating fresh spinach or fresh spinach-containing products until further notice.

"Although we have not seen any cases of *E. coli* related to contaminated spinach in Greene County, we urge the public to follow FDA recommendations," explains Kendra Williams, Administrator of Community Health and Epidemiology. "*E. coli* can be a very serious illness, particularly in children under age five."

E. coli bacteria normally live in the intestines of humans and animals. Most strains of *E. coli* are harmless, but some produce toxins that can cause illness. A person can get *E. coli* from eating contaminated food, such as undercooked meat, raw fruits or raw vegetables, or by swallowing contaminated water. A person can also become ill with *E. coli* from contaminated surfaces touched by a person who doesn't wash their hands after using the restroom or changing a diaper.

"Common symptoms of illness caused by *E. coli* include stomach cramps and severe diarrhea," adds Williams. "The illness can also lead to blood in the stool and kidney damage. Anyone who develops these symptoms should contact their health care provider as soon as possible. While anyone can become ill with *E. coli*, senior adults and children under five are more at risk for developing severe illness."

The best protection against *E. coli* is frequent hand washing with soap and water, especially after petting animals, handling raw meat and using the restroom, and before eating. In addition, meat should be cooked to a recommended internal temperature, and raw fruits and vegetables should be washed thoroughly. Because of the link to contaminated spinach in this current outbreak, fresh spinach and fresh spinach-containing products should also be avoided until further notice.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report 114 cases of *E. coli* to date linked to fresh spinach, including 18 cases of Hemolytic Uremic Syndrome (HUS), 60 hospitalizations and one death.

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